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CHAUCER'S MINOR POEMS.

CHAUCER: *The Minor Poems*. Edited by
WALTER W. SKEAT. Oxford, at the
Clarendon Press, 1888. 8vo, pp. lxxxvi, 462.

DR. FURNIVALL* has made an appeal for "somebody with access to a large library to compile 'The Praise of Chaucer'—all allusions to him from his own day to (say) DRYDEN, and the chief ones since." This appeal, it is hoped, will soon find a fitting response; for a history of opinion relating to CHAUCER as a poet, which would be made possible by such a collection of evidence, would constitute a novel and important adjunct to the history of English poetry. Just as the characteristics of the dramatists of the Restoration Period may be understood by their treatment of the plays of SHAKESPEARE, so the repute of CHAUCER at any given time will serve to reveal much of the culture and of the poetic fashions of that time. It is well known, for example, that DRYDEN was an enthusiastic admirer of CHAUCER, but it was an admiration that was unpardonably restricted. He praised CHAUCER as a "perpetual fountain of good sense," and, as "the father of English poetry," held him "in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held HOMER, or the Romans, VIRGIL;" but the sad limitation followed: "The verse of CHAUCER, I confess, is not harmonious to us; but is like the eloquence of one whom TACITUS commends, it was *auribus istius temporis accommodata*: they who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of LYDGATE and GOWER his contemporaries: there is a rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect. . . . It were an easy matter to produce some thousands of his verses which are lame for want of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronunciation can make otherwise. We can only say, that he lived in the infancy of our poetry, and that nothing is brought to perfection at the first."† That DRYDEN's judgment of the harmonies of CHAUCER's verse was the common judgment

of his day, is confirmed by other witnesses. It is in the same mood that WALLER ‡ wrote:

"CHAUCER his sense can only boast;
The glory of his numbers lost!
Years have defaced his matchless strain;
And yet he did not sing in vain."

The romantic freshness and freedom of CHAUCER, as surely and for the same reason as that of the Elizabethans, was not in accord with the canon of conventional diction and of artificial correctness. A time of reaction, however, set in, and a "return to Elizabethanism has marked the whole course of Victorian poetry." If, as MR. SYMONDS§ says, "the general scope and tone of poetry in these periods are closely similar," there has, as a natural consequence, been restored a bond of sympathy between the first period of romantic spontaneity and the last. Such considerations bring us to the true point from which to regard the poems of CHAUCER. The period that was ushered in by the boyish filchings from CHAUCER's vocabulary, was also born with a spirit attuned to his harmonies. And how intuitive has been our return to CHAUCER! Not satisfied with that freedom in poetic art introduced by CHATTERTON, COLERIDGE, BYRON, WORDSWORTH, KEATS, SHELLEY, TENNYSON and BROWNING, "the brawnier neo-Elizabethan Titan," but even in our refinements of that art we have, by a circuitous way, been strangely brought to the same practices which CHAUCER delighted in; we suffer our poets to assay those compositions

"That highten Balades, Roundels, Virelayes."

A mere hint is thus given of a theme which properly developed would reveal a peculiar appropriateness of the publication now under review. But space will permit no more than the expression of the hope that many new readers may be won to the appreciation of poems too frequently unknown even to readers of the 'Canterbury Tales.' The intrinsic merit of some of these poems falls below the highest mark of the poet's achievement, others stand high on the scale of excellence, and moreover bring us peculiarly near to CHAUCER's personality; but it is enough to say that they

*Academy, December 22, 1888.

†Preface to *Fables*. Globe ed. p. 499.

‡In a poem entitled 'Of English Verse.'

§*Fortnightly Review*, January, 1889.

all reflect the picturesqueness of that age which serves our poets as a simile for what is brilliant,† and it is a rich experience to be able, in this instance, to say :

"The tide of time flow'd back with me,
The forward-flowing tide of time."

In this new volume MR. SKEAT, to whom the student of CHAUCER already owes so much, has accomplished the needful task of bringing together all the poems (exclusive of the 'Canterbury Tales,' 'Troilus and Cressida,' and the 'Legend of Good Women') that modern criticism attributes to the poet. A minutely elaborate "Introduction" sets forth the evidence upon which this canon is constructed, and upon which the editor has introduced a slight variation and extension of it; the text is obtained by a critical regard to the original sources; an ample body of explanatory notes such as MR. SKEAT is peculiarly able to supply, increases the bulk of the volume by almost two hundred closely printed pages, and the diction is defined in a very useful "Glossarial Index."

Although the CHAUCER SOCIETY by its work and publications in the past years has paved the way to such a publication as this, a critical mind and a skilled hand were required to sift material of such wide scope and diversity of character, and to draw out a clear presentation from a complex network of problems. It is, therefore, an occasion for grateful acknowledgment to know that one of the very few scholars fitted for it, has not withheld his services in mediating between the interests of special scholarship and the needs of the wider educational world.

A critical text, with elaborate notes, of such a considerable portion of CHAUCER'S poems cannot, in our present state of English studies, be expected to escape criticism of details. Many questions and processes are thus presented in new combination, and under more favorable conditions for determination, as is attested by the suggestions which the book has already elicited from different quarters.

†To look toward Andres' Golden Field
Across this wide ærial plain,
Which glows as if the Middle Age
Were gorgeous upon earth again.
MATTHEW ARNOLD, 'Calais Sands.'

In the same spirit of thankful appreciation of MR. SKEAT'S labor, it may, therefore, be permitted to subjoin to this notice a few of the jottings that have been made in the examination of his pages.

In the following comments a somewhat categorical form of statement, employed for the sake of brevity, will be pardoned.—i, 4 I scan: *Glórious virgíne of álle floíres flour*; cf. i, 96: *Nóble princéss*, etc.—In the case of iii, 51 and of iii, 76, the readings of TEN BRINK ('Sprache und Verskunst,' §§ 301, 300) seem best: *Than playen either at chesse or tables*; *Now for to speken of his wife*.—TEN BRINK'S analysis (§300) of the variants of iii, 87 deserves notice.—There is no necessity in rejecting, against the evidence of all the MSS., *ne* from iii, 237; *never* before words beginning with a consonant may be metrically monosyllabic, as in iii, 73, to which MR. SKEAT himself refers in his note to ii, 33 (cf. the compound *nevertheless* ix, 620 and *whider* ix, 602).—The scansion of iii, 515 is: *He wás war óf me, hów I stoód*, with a "hovering" accent on the first five syllables; the theory for such a line advanced by TEN BRINK (§302) is not satisfactory.—I see no reason for assuming an unusual accentuation of *besette* in iii, 1096; the line can be read *withóut(e) drede Í besétte hit*, or better *withóute dréde, Í besétte hit*, slurring the *be-* just as *ne* and *the* are often treated (cf. TEN BRINK p. 154).—iii, 958 *noon other lak* is to me not "absurd;" possible defects are implied in the preceding list of perfections.—I cannot agree with the note to ix, 511; *listeth* is the imperative plural repeating *herkneth* in sense, and therefore means 'listen.' This is in accordance with the formula often used at the beginning of poetic narratives (cf. the first lines of the 'Octavian,' of 'Thomas of Erceldoune,' etc.). The variants in this instance suggest the same interpretation, and may be compared with 'Piers the Plowman' C xxxi, 297.—CHAUCER, in separating the names *Iulo* and *Ascanius*, ix, 177-178, must not be understood to have two persons in mind, for he is clear in the matter at line 192 just below; the separation serves the poet with another of those playful, almost waggish, couplets in which this poem abounds.—In the notes to the much-disputed lines iii, 1028-1029 MR. SKEAT does not mention MR. A. HALL'S

suggested interpretation of *hoodless*: "without a turban; *i. e.* to travel as a Giaour, which would be unsafe, whereas to be dressed as a Dervish, *à la Palgrave*, might enable him to pass" (*Notes and Queries*, April 18, 1885, p. 315); and DR. W. HAND BROWNE's note on *the drye se* (*Notes and Queries*, Feb. 21, 1885, p. 149) has also apparently escaped the editor's notice, and may, therefore, be quoted for the convenience of those that may not have easy access to the original: "Mr. Brae . . . argues, with plausibility, that the Carrenare is the gulf Il Carnaro (now Il Quarnero) in the Adriatic, between Istria and the coast of Croatia, said to be very dangerous to mariners. Of *the drye se* however, Mr. Brae can make nothing. If we accept this explanation of the Carrenare, why should not *the drye se* be the Adria Sea, or Adriatic? CHAUCER would have written this *adrye*, like *Walakye*, *Surrye*, *Arabye*; and the customary crasis of the article would give us *thadrye se*."—xxi, 36 *Than ál | this wórd(e)s | richéss(e) | or cré | atúre* is so obviously correct both in sound and in sense, that one must attribute MR. SKEAT's note to an accidental inadvertence. A like judgment is applicable to the note on ix, 1063. *lyf* in Middle English often means 'a living person' (*vide* MAYHEW and SKEAT's 'Concise M. E. Dictionary'); so in this place, *lyves* (genitive) *body* has the sense of 'a living person's body,' 'a living man.'

In the "Introduction" an error, important enough to correct, occurs at page viii. The titles in MASON's Preface (p. 14), where vi and ix ('Modir of Lyf,' and 'Modir of God,' respectively) are both named 'Ad beatam Virginem,' have occasioned, as may be conjectured, the misstatement that the 'Mother of God' was printed in MASON's edition of 'Occleve's Poems' (1796).

The student of CHAUCER feels at every turn the want of an exhaustive dictionary of the poet's language; an extension, therefore, of the "Glossarial Index" to a complete Glossary for the texts in this volume, would be widely welcomed.

JAMES. W. BRIGHT.

Die Jungfrau von Orleans von J. C. F. VON SCHILLER. By BENJ. W. WELLS, Ph. D. 12mo, pp, xix. 224. Boston. D. C. Heath & Co. 1889.

SCHILLER's 'Jungfrau von Orleans' has been and will continue to be a favorite textbook with students of German. This explains why publishers of German classics make it one of their series. Another edition of this beautiful drama has been sent out by D. C. Heath & Co., and both publishers and editor are to be congratulated on their success.

The biographical notices of the historical characters in the drama are excellent, and by dispensing with the troublesome work of referring to biographical dictionaries and encyclopædias will prove very beneficial to a large class of students who are either too indolent or too careless to look for any light outside the textbook and classroom. The editor is anxious that the pupil should enter "into the spirit of the period and the characters," so that he may view the work from a critical and literary standpoint, without which no one can fully appreciate this excellent drama. To render this easy, DR. WELLS has furnished very copious notes; besides the purely historical, there are many appropriate allusions to the classics, both ancient and modern. Very interesting and to the point are the notes to lines 526, 697, 1157, 2145 and 2345. Some readers will be disappointed, on turning to the notes, not to find some light upon such terms as *Rabenmutter*, l. 15; *den heil'gen Pfug*, 347; *Tafelrunde*, 543; for, unfortunately, many bright pupils know more about Greek and Roman mythology than about modern literature.

The grammatical and linguistic notes are, in general, quite full, but the author proceeds either on the basis that it is more important for the student to be acquainted with the history and literature than with the grammar and dictionary, or that he has more knowledge of the former. He has done well to insert the grammatical appendix, pp. 223-4, containing the regimen of verbs, and the subjunctive mood—two pages which will prove very valuable to the beginner. We are tempted to ask why they were not placed at the beginning instead of at the close of the book.